

small businesses and other individuals an opportunity to pool together to try to make health insurance coverage more affordable and accessible so more people can have health insurance. We can use this to build on some of the great reforms we passed as recently as 2003 which allow people to create such things as health savings accounts, which has given rise to the whole notion of consumer-driven health care.

Someone pointed out to me not too long ago that we know more about the used cars we buy than we do about the health care services we purchase because we can find out about quality, we can find out about price, and we can compare. The fact is, the American consumer is largely denied that opportunity, and we need to provide that sort of transparency so that patients can compare and make the best decision for their needs and their family, and which, not coincidentally, will help bring down the price of health care services because people will be able to then pay out of their health savings account. Obviously, that will have an impact on utilization rates as well.

I thank the Chair for his patience and willingness to assume that position so I could say these few words both out of pride for my State and for the successful experiment we have conducted in Texas which has now served as a wonderful model for the United States going forward to try to address a true crisis. But not only a crisis, it is something that, once we address this and hopefully pass this medical liability legislation, Senator ENZI's health care bill which will provide greater access to health insurance and provide people with a better life, that we will ultimately have done something good that the American people can say: I know my Senator and my Congressman are up in Washington, and they are actually listening to what we are saying. They are actually dealing with the great issues that affect the quality of my life and my family's life, and that we will have done something of which we can be very proud.

I yield the floor.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

In December, 2004, a 30-year-old man was beaten outside a restaurant in downtown Seattle, WA. The man received a concussion, split lip, loose teeth, a black eye, and bruises from being kicked while on the ground. The victim believed his assailants beat him

up because they thought that he was gay.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

35TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMTRAK

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Amtrak. When the first Amtrak Clocker train left New York, bound for New Jersey and Philadelphia, on May 1, 1971, it ushered in a new era of passenger rail travel in the United States. Millions of passengers from every corner of America can attest to the fact that Amtrak remains a vital part of our nationwide transportation network, and I firmly believe it's imperative that we not just preserve our nation's passenger rail system, but also develop it.

Amtrak's transformation from a tiny initiative with only 25 workers and widespread expectations of failure, to a successful national corporation with 19,700 employees in nearly every state, is one of the great success stories I've witnessed during my many years in the Senate. Every day approximately 68,000 travelers rely on Amtrak as an effective alternative to the hassles and delays of air travel, and the increasingly prohibitive gas costs and traffic congestion associated with highway travel.

Amtrak remains enormously important to my home State of New Jersey. Last year, for instance, over 3.4 million people boarded or exited an Amtrak train at the six rail stations in New Jersey, and nearly 1,700 New Jersey residents worked for Amtrak during this same time period. Approximately 110 Amtrak trains travel through my home State every day; this service, combined with the many rail lines that New Jersey Transit, SEPTA, PATH, and PATCO operate, truly makes New Jersey a national leader in passenger rail. I am immensely proud of this distinction—as all New Jerseyans are—and it would not be possible without Amtrak. The benefits of such a system are immense; without rails, our State would suffocate under extreme highway and airport traffic congestion. On Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service between Washington, DC, and Boston, MA, which stops at several points in New Jersey, the trains carry as many people as 75,000 fully loaded Boeing 757 jets each year. By contrast, there are only 102 flights between downtown Washington, DC, and the three New York City-area airports on an average weekday.

On December 11, 2000, the first Acela Express service began on the Northeast Corridor. As one of the leading proponents of high-speed rail in the Con-

gress, it has been a marvel to see the success of this train and its example of how high-speed rail can be successful in our country. I am a frequent rider of the Acela Express between New Jersey and Washington, and I appreciate the service for the same reasons that many others do: it is efficient, it is comfortable, it is cost-effective, and it is convenient. Most tellingly, the Acela Express's operations do not require a subsidy, and I expect its ridership to continue to grow as others discover the advantages of this remarkable train.

Mr. President, it is unfortunate that despite the great successes of Amtrak, it is necessary for the many defenders of the system myself included to fight for its survival at every turn. There are many within the Bush administration—and within the House and Senate—who would like nothing better than to see Amtrak wither and die, stranding millions of travelers in the process. We cannot let this happen, and as long as I am a member of the Senate, I will not let this happen. I will continue to work with a diverse set of colleagues on both sides of the aisle who realize the advantages of providing options for travelers and having a balanced national transportation system.

In short, Mr. President, I salute Amtrak for its achievements, and I extend the railroad and its employees, who are the backbone of the railroad's operation, warmest wishes for continued success through the next 35 years.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, due to the untimely loss of my beloved sister, Marilyn "Nubs" Hatch Kuch, I have been necessarily absent for a portion of the debate and votes on Wednesday, May 3 and Thursday, May 4, 2006.

Concerning the votes I missed, if I were present I would have voted as follows: nay for amendment No. 3616, striking funding to States based on their production of certain types of crops, livestock and/or dairy products; nay for amendment No. 3673, providing funds for assessments of critical reservoirs and dams in the State of Hawaii; nay for amendment No. 3601, allocating \$1,000,000 for the monitoring of waters off the coast of the State of Hawaii; yea for amendment No. 3704, allocating \$20,000,000 from the AmeriCorps program to the Veterans Health Administration for medical facilities; yea for final passage of H.R. 4939, the Fiscal Year 2006 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery; yea for Executive Calendar No. 617, the nomination of Brian M. Cogan of New York to be the U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of New York; and yea for Executive Calendar No. 618, the nomination of Thomas M. Golden of Pennsylvania to be the U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. None of these votes would have changed the final outcome.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday I was pleased to introduce,